

## **A Tale of Two Wars: Framing Analysis of Online News Sites in Coalition Countries and the Arab World during the Iraq War**

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*The Iraq War was a defining media event. This study used quantitative content analysis to explore the websites of prestige news media in the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as Egypt and Qatar, examining both the frames used by news media in their coverage of the conflict, as well as the voices heard—and unheard—throughout the coverage. The analysis showed that the “tale of war” was constructed differently by the different international media. Arab online news media were more likely to use the military conflict and violence of war frame, whereas Coalition media emphasized the rebuilding of Iraq frame. Differences in the tone of coverage and the use of sources across the four news media were also found.*

**KEYWORDS** *Arab media, international conflict and media, Iraq war, news framing, war coverage*

The 2003 Iraq War represented a defining moment for media coverage of international conflict, especially in the context of Internet-based news coverage. While Nielsen/NetRatings indicated that television remained the main source for war information in the United States (Kornblum, 2003), the growing

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importance of the Internet as a source of in-depth, up-to-the-minute, and alternative news was clear in the web traffic patterns during the first weeks of the conflict. Internet news sites around the world saw double-digit increases in visits during the first week of the war (Fallows & Ranie, 2004; Kornblum, 2003; Legard & Lemon, 2003), with traffic particularly heavy during the work day, when individuals were less likely to have access to a television, and more likely to have high-speed Internet access on employers' broadband connections. As one commentator noted, "Nowhere is it more apparent that people hunger for a range of war-related news—and nowhere can that desire be more quickly fed—than on the Net" (Kornblum, 2003, p. 1).

Although a few scholars have examined the global news coverage of the war (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005; Lewis, 2004; Pfau et al., 2004; Robertson, 2004), few have done so in a comparative context (e.g., Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, & Trammell, 2005). Even fewer studies have examined the war coverage in the Arab world (El-Bendary, 2003; Ghanem, 2005). This lack of comparative studies constitutes a major gap in the academic literature, in light of the global stage on which the run up to the war took place, the international nature of the Coalition of the Willing, and the broad public opinion chasm evident between Americans, Europeans, and citizens of the Arab world before, during, and after the war. One goal of this study was to begin to fill this gap in comparative analyses by exploring the framing of the 2003 Iraq War on the leading news websites in both the Arab world and top Coalition countries: the United States and the United Kingdom.

According to Hanley (2003), when the U.S.-led Coalition of the Willing went to war in March 2003, American and British television news audiences saw "a gripping made-for-TV show starring brave U.S. and British troops putting their lives on the line to bring freedom to oppressed Iraqis" (p. 6), whereas viewers of Arabic news coverage saw programming dominated by "wounded and screaming Iraqi women and children, captured or terrified Iraqi—and yes, U.S. and British—soldiers" (p. 6). Research indicates that such differences in media metaphors, or frames, can have consequences for viewers' reasoning and beliefs about events (McCombs & Ghanem, 2003). Did web surfers find similar disparities in war framing? Considering the growing importance of the Internet as a source of up-to-the-minute war information, the lack of research on Internet news coverage of the war represents an important gap in the current literature. Through its analysis of online news sources, this study attempts to fill this gap as well.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### News Media and Public Opinion

Research on the "war on terror," the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and previous military conflicts set the stage for current studies of the 2003 Iraq War. Many

of these studies have documented that the way media frame conflicts influence public opinion in the country of focus. Lewis (2004), for example, examined the television coverage of the Iraq War in Great Britain. He argued that TV coverage influenced British public opinion by making it more acceptable to support pro-war government actions (Lewis, 2004). This changing climate of opinion was attributed to providing the British public with media narratives that made war claims plausible (Lewis, 2004). Other studies have also documented that the media influence public opinion as well as policy-makers, especially during times of crisis. In the United States, the alleged links between Iraq and the September 11th attacks and the claims for weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Saddam heavily contributed to public support for the Iraq War (Foyle, 2004).

### Framing of War

A useful theoretical framework for the study of war coverage is framing. Researchers have studied news framing from three different perspectives: cognitive, constructivist, and critical (d'Angelo, 2002). Entman (1993) believed that framing "essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" (p. 52). Making certain aspects more salient than others in media content leads to different construction of reality. Ultimately, framing has implications for the worldview of those exposed to it. "The mosaic or gestalt resulting from a frame can predispose the recipient of the framed message toward a particular line of reasoning or outcome" (McCombs & Ghanem, 2003, p. 77).

A media frame can be described as an organizing mechanism for media content. As such, it provides immediate context to the recipient of the frame, through the selection, emphasis or exclusion of specific facts or ideas. Pan and Kosicki (1993) identified four main news dimensions that influence the development of frames: syntactic structures, or word choice; script structures, or an evaluation of the newsworthiness of an event; thematic structures, including causal themes for news events; and rhetorical structures, which includes "stylistic" choices made by journalists. The current study uses analysis of all four types of framing decisions.

Most of the published studies on coverage of the Iraq War have focused within a specific country (e.g., Buchinger, Wasserman, & de Beer, 2004; Lewis, 2004), the public opinion trends before and during the war (e.g., Foyle, 2004; Haumann & Petersen, 2004), or embedded journalism (e.g., Pfau et al., 2004). Pfau et al. used quantitative content analysis to study the framing decisions made by embedded American journalists during the war. Their results indicated that embedded journalists' stories were more positive and used more episodic frames than stories produced by non-embedded journalists.

Comparing the pre-war framing of the 2003 Iraq War, Ghanem (2005) found differences in the reasons for war provided by the elite newspapers in Egypt and the United States, *Al Abram* and *The New York Times*, respectively. She also found that the war was framed mostly in political terms in both papers.

## Sources

One of the devices that influences news framing of events is the choice of sources. Baden's (2003) pre-war study compared the coverage of *The Guardian* (U.K.) and *The New York Times* (U.S.). Even though both countries were an integral part of the Coalition of the Willing, the study found some differences between these elite newspapers. Specifically, *The Guardian* framed its coverage through the use of more foreign official sources. Another study focused on the framing of the War on Terrorism in the 10 largest newspapers in the United States (Ryan, 2004). An analysis of their editorials immediately after September 11th until the bombing of Afghanistan showed some interesting features: editorial writers used official government sources frequently, relying most often on U.S. government officials; the framing of the War on Terrorism was often one-dimensional and suggested a binary split in the world; and editorial narratives implied that military attack was the remedy and the only possible response to September 11th (Ryan, 2004). Ryan also found that the moral and practical consequences of the American military strikes were rarely discussed.

In one of the few comparative studies, the coverage of the Greek terrorist group N17 was examined in the *Toronto Star* and *The New York Times*. The comparison showed no significant differences in terms of sources cited between the two newspapers (Zaharopolous, 2004). The results also showed that the most commonly used sources were the U.S. government, the Greek government, and the police. Ordinary citizens were rarely cited (Zaharopolous, 2004). Focusing specifically on the media coverage of the 2003 Iraq War, Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2005) found that the elite newspaper in the U.S. was more likely than the Swedish paper to rely on official government and military sources. Comparing *Al Abram* and *The New York Times*' pre-war coverage, Ghanem (2005) found that *The Times* relied more heavily on U.S. sources whereas *Al Abram* used more Arabic sources.

## Tone

Cultural differences seem to influence the coverage of international conflicts (e.g., Aday et al., 2005; Ravi, 2005). Still few studies have been conducted to compare and contrast coverage between the so-called Western media and the media in the Middle East. Topoushian (2002), for example, compared newspaper coverage of the first Gulf War in Arab newspapers and U.S.

and Canadian newspapers. She found that the 1990–1991 Gulf War was constructed differently between the Arab and North American media and that the news coverage closely reflected the official foreign policy of each country. Thus, we anticipate differences in tone between Arabic and North American media coverage.

In a cross-cultural study of the 2003 Iraq, Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2005) did examine the tone of news coverage between Sweden and the United States. Their results showed that even though the majority of news articles in both countries were predominantly neutral, the Swedish newspaper was more negative in tone than its U.S. counterpart. Further, the more negative coverage in Sweden was consistent with the public opinion at that time, the majority of which opposed the war. In one of the first cross-cultural analyses of the 2003 Iraq War to include an Arabic media outlet, Aday et al. (2005) showed that close to 11% of *Al Jazeera's* TV news coverage was critical of the war. In contrast, the major American television networks were rarely critical of the war; further, 38% of Fox's news coverage was supportive in tone (Aday et al., 2005).

### Frames in Media Content

Several studies have suggested that the American public was exposed to different news coverage of the war, both in print and broadcast media, compared with other countries (Aday et al., 2005; Buchinger et al., 2004; Ghanem, 2005; Hanley, 2004; Media Tenor, 2003). A comparative content analysis of the immediate war coverage of Gulf War II showed some specific framing differences between American and foreign news websites: for instance, international media used the responsibility and prognostic frames more frequently than U.S. media whereas the U.S. coverage focused significantly more on the military conflict and media self-referential frames (Dimitrova et al., 2005).

Aday et al. (2005) found that U.S. TV networks focused heavily on battles and war tactics in their war coverage. Further, they found that the networks ignored the opposition to the war and presented the American viewer with a sanitized picture of the war. Ravi (2005) examined five major newspapers from the United States, United Kingdom, India, and Pakistan. He concluded that the Iraq War coverage was influenced by national interest as well as cultural practices in each country.

The literature on sources, tone, and framing of war summarized above, although suggestive of some differences, is not unequivocal about how Coalition and Arab media might differ in their war coverage. To explore these possible differences, we formulated the following research question:

- RQ1:** How did the Coalition media and the Arab media compare in their online coverage of the 2003 Iraq War in terms of (a) sources, (b) tone of coverage, and (c) frames?

The media in the Middle East seem to have struggled with the coverage of issues or events that involve other Arab nations. A recent article in *The New York Times* described challenges to reporters at *Al Arabiya*, the main TV competitor of *Al Jazeera* in the region, where terminology regarding the American forces in Iraq has become problematic (Shapiro, 2005). While some on the *Al Arabiya* staff supported the idea of calling Coalition troops “multi-national forces,” others wanted to continue as they had done before and call them “occupation forces” (Shapiro, 2005).

Very few studies have compared the actual coverage across a group of countries, using the same methodology and research design. The goal of the present study is to fill this important gap by analyzing the war coverage in the prestige news outlets of the following countries: Egypt, Qatar, United Kingdom, and the United States.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

This study focused on the home pages of major international news organizations during the 2003 Iraq War. The Pew Internet and American Life Project has documented that the Internet was a major information source during the war (Fallows & Rainie, 2004). The goal of this study was to examine media from two vastly different regions. On the one hand were the countries leading the Coalition of the Willing—the United States and the United Kingdom. A prestige newspaper from each country was chosen for analysis: *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, respectively. In their comparative study of framing decisions during the coverage of the civil war in Somalia, Bantimaroudis and Ban (2003) compared differences in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, stating that they are “major gatekeepers in the United States and Europe, respectively” (p. 176).

A different rationale was used for choosing the news sites from the Arab-speaking world. *Al Abram* is the newspaper of record for the Egyptian government, which occupies a unique and influential position in the Arab-speaking world. *Al Jazeera*, on the other hand, is a news organization founded by the Qatari government, whose ubiquitous satellite television broadcasts have made it particularly important in the development of the opinions of the “Arab street.” The website for this news organization was selected for this study. A quantitative content analysis was used to analyze the online news coverage of these four news sites and to answer the above research question by focusing on the use of sources, frames, and tone of coverage.

### Coding Procedures

The unit of analysis was the home page of each of the four online media as follows: *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com>), *The Guardian*

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>), *Al Abram* (<http://www.ahram.org.eg/>), and *Al Jazeera* (<http://www.aljazeera.net>). The home pages were downloaded during the official war period—March 20, 2003, to May 1, 2003. Because the objective of the study was to study the page most likely to be seen by Internet news users—namely, the home page—no links were followed. All headlines, text, and photos pertaining to the Iraq War were content analyzed. A total of 112 home pages from the official war period were archived for analysis.

Several coding categories were incorporated in the study. These included dominant tone<sup>1</sup> of coverage (positive toward the U.S. position on the war, negative toward the U.S. position on the war, and neutral/mixed—i.e., neither clearly positive or clearly negative toward the U.S. position on the war), war frames (military conflict, focus on the troops, and military developments), violence of war (emphasis on destruction as well as human cost of war), human interest (focus on the human participants in the event), prognostic frame (long-term effects of the war), diagnostic frame (reasons leading to the war), anti-war protesters frame (anti-war activities), oil resources frame (focus on the oil resources in Iraq), media self-referential frame (emphasis on the role of media and journalists in the conflict), looting frame (focus on anarchy and looting accidents), responsibility frame (looking for blame), and rebuilding of Iraq frame (rebuilding and renewal themes); and type of sources cited (government official, military personnel, individual, journalist, terrorist group member, and other). Another variable of interest was the use of negative moral terms in the online news reporting. Such terms included but were not limited to the following: “horrible,” “anti-God,” “monstrous,” “heinous,” “disgusting,” “vicious,” or “barbaric.” The home pages were also coded for the use of off-the-record quotes in the online war coverage. Finally, to capture whose opinions were voiced in the coverage, sites were coded for the mention of individual actors, groups/organizations, and countries in the war coverage.

Coding was completed by trained students. The Arab online news sites were coded by a graduate student proficient in both Arabic and English. Precautions were taken to ensure that the coding categories were correctly translated into another language. Intercoder reliability check was conducted on a sample of the English-language newspapers. Intercoder reliability was established at +.86 across all categories, using Holsti’s formula.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that due to the availability of only one Arab-speaking coder, the intercoder reliability check consisted of the Arab coder recoding 10% of the English-language home pages.

## RESULTS

The content analysis yielded a total of 112 home pages from the four online news sites. To answer our research question, cross tabulations were run for

**TABLE 1** Sources and Tone across Coalition and Arab Online Media.

Website characteristic	Coalition media		Arab media		All media (N = 112)
	<i>New York Times</i> (n = 38)	<i>The Guardian</i> (n = 19)	<i>Al Ahram</i> (n = 33)	<i>Al Jazeera</i> (n = 22)	
Government representative cited	37 (97.4%)	6 (31.6%)	33 (100%)	14 (63.6%)	90 (80.4%)
Military personnel cited	16 (42.1%)	4 (21.1%)	14 (42.4%)	11 (50%)	45 (40.1%)
Citizen cited	1 (2.6%)	0	0	5 (22.7%)	6 (5.4%)
Journalist cited	0	0	23 (69.7%)	18 (81.8%)	41 (36.6%)
Negative tone	0	0	12 (36.4%)	20 (90.9%)	32 (28.6%)
Neutral/mixed tone	38 (100%)	19 (100%)	21 (63.6%)	2 (9.1%)	80 (71.4%)
Negative moral terms	0	2 (10.5%)	3 (9.1%)	15 (68.2%)	20 (17.9%)

Note: Sources and negative moral terms were coded on a presence/absence basis.

each of the pertinent variables. The results below show some interesting differences as well as some similarities in the coverage of the 2003 Iraq War.

### Sources

First, we examined whether the Coalition and Arab online news media differed in their use of sources. Sources cited were categorized in five groups: government representative, military personnel, individual, journalist, and terrorist group member. A category for “other” was also offered. As expected from prior research, the most frequently used sources were government and military officials (see Table 1). None of the online news sites cited terrorist group members in their war coverage. The differences between the four news outlets in terms of use of sources were not clear-cut. For example, the two news media that relied most heavily on official government sources were *The New York Times* where 97% of the home pages cited government sources and *Al Ahram* where all the home pages examined in this study contained government sources. *The Guardian* relied on government sources only in one-third of the online coverage. There were no clear-cut differences among the four media outlets in terms of using military sources either. Arab news sites seemed to rely more heavily on journalists as sources, whereas Coalition media never cited such sources. Overall, each news outlet relied on a fairly similar mix of sources in their online coverage of the Iraq War.

### Tone

Next, we compared the tone of war coverage between Coalition and Arab news sites. None of the four online news outlets examined here offered online coverage that was clearly positive in tone (see Table 1). *The New York*



*Times* and *The Guardian* offered predominantly neutral coverage in all of their home pages. In contrast, the two Arab media outlets were often critical of the war and the online coverage was more negative in tone. Specifically, the vast majority of online news stories on the *Al Jazeera* news site were negative: 91%. About one-third of the *Al Abram* coverage—36%—was also coded as anti-war coverage. To further investigate this difference, we also examined the use of negative moral terms such as “heinous,” “horrible,” and “anti-God” in reference to the war. Here, again, *Al Jazeera* emerged as the news site to use such terms most frequently. Consistent with Ravi’s (2005) findings, *The Guardian* also used negative moral terms on several occasions, but its war coverage remained predominantly neutral.

## Frames

The final comparison explored the possible differences in the use of several pre-defined frames in the 2003 Iraq war coverage. The results are presented in Table 2. Of the 11 war frames investigated here, several frames clearly differ between the Arab and Coalition online media. First, it is worth noting that the Arab media focused heavily on the “military conflict” and “violence of war” frames. In fact, the violence of war frame was always present in the Arab coverage in our sample with heavy online coverage about destruction and military and civilian casualties. Secondly, the Arab media ignored the “rebuilding of Iraq” frame almost completely in contrast to Coalition media. As expected, the online news sites from Egypt and Qatar discussed responsibility issues more often than their U.S. and U.K. counterparts; the “responsibility” frame was present in one-third of the Arab media coverage while it was virtually ignored in the two Coalition newspapers examined in this study.

**TABLE 2** War Frames across Coalition and Arab Online Media.

Website frame	Coalition media		Arab media		All media (N = 112)
	<i>New York Times</i> (n = 38)	<i>The Guardian</i> (n = 19)	<i>Al Ahram</i> (n = 33)	<i>Al Jazeera</i> (n = 22)	
Military conflict	30 (78.9%)	13 (68.4%)	33 (100%)	22 (100%)	98 (87.5%)
Human interest	24 (63.2%)	9 (47.4%)	21 (63.6%)	20 (90.9%)	74 (66.1%)
Responsibility	0	0	10 (30.3%)	6 (27.3%)	16 (14.3%)
Diagnostic frame	1 (2.6%)	0	9 (27.3%)	3 (13.6%)	13 (11.6%)
Prognostic frame	21 (55.3%)	12 (63.2%)	7 (21.2%)	8 (36.4%)	48 (42.9%)
Anti-war protest	11 (28.9%)	10 (52.6%)	8 (24.2%)	11 (50%)	40 (35.7%)
Rebuilding of Iraq	25 (65.8%)	10 (52.6%)	0	1 (4.5%)	36 (32.1%)
Media self-reference	7 (18.4%)	9 (47.4%)	24 (72.7%)	16 (72.7%)	56 (50%)
Violence of war	33 (86.8%)	18 (94.7%)	33 (100%)	22 (100%)	106 (94.6%)
Oil resources frame	10 (26.3%)	2 (10.5%)	15 (45.5%)	0	27 (24.1%)
Looting frame	8 (21.1%)	3 (15.8%)	0	1 (4.5%)	12 (10.7%)

The British and American websites seemed to focus more heavily on looting problems than did the Arab sites. Interestingly, there were no clear-cut differences in the use of the “anti-war protest” frame, which is consistent with Ghanem’s (2005) pre-war analysis. It is also worth noting that the Arab media were more likely to discuss the role of media/journalists in the conflict as evidenced by the prevalence of media self-referential frame on their websites and by source attribution. This finding may be related to the fact that Arab journalists had easier access to Baghdad and other areas in Iraq than Western journalists. The differences in framing suggest that Arab and Coalition media presented quite different tales of the same war through the use of different frames in their online news coverage.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that even in the age of globalization, significant differences exist in the way national media cover war and conflict. This was evident from the differences in the tone of coverage of the four online news sites examined here. The Arab media were clearly more critical of the war, as expected, than the two Coalition newspapers. This was particularly true for the *Al Jazeera* website, which contained predominantly negative coverage and tended to incorporate a large number of negative moral terms to condemn the war. For example, a March 29, 2003 headline said: “Americans massacre Iraqis in Baghdad and use banned weapons, killing 96.” The term *massacre* is morally charged, implying, according to *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, that “helpless or unresisting human beings” are killed under “conditions of atrocity or cruelty” (2000, p. 713). Not surprisingly, no coverage among the Coalition of the Willing websites studied used similar terms to describe American or British actions in Iraq.

The most likely reason for this difference in the war coverage is rooted in the differences in public opinion in each country. The public in the Arab world was critical of the 2003 Iraq War and remains so today. This widespread criticism was, naturally, reflected in the national mass media. Media institutions, as McQuail skillfully noted, are deeply rooted in the socio-political environment in which they operate (McQuail, 1994). Further, *Al Jazeera* claims to represent the voices of the “Arab street.” El-Bendary (2003) has noted that Qatari-owned *Al Jazeera* constitutes a kind of “cultural revolution” in the Middle East, influencing governments and challenging the Saudi grip on Arab news discourse. However, the station was created by edict of the emir of Qatar and has never openly criticized the Qatari government. As such, *Al Jazeera*’s negative coverage can be seen as a manifestation of the predominant values of the Arab institutions that gave it life.

Another possible reason for the differences in the tone of coverage could be dominant journalistic values. Western journalistic tradition stresses

the value of objectivity, which could perhaps explain why the U.S. and British coverage examined here was predominantly neutral in tone. This is consistent with Aday et al. (2005) who concluded that the U.S. network coverage of the war remained neutral or objective, with the exception of FOX where 38% of the news stories were supportive of the war. Connolly-Ahern and Golan (in press) suggested that Islamic democracies enjoy less freedom of the press than their non-Islamic counterparts. Thus, the negative tone of the Arabic-language coverage may reflect a different set of journalistic values.

In addition to tone, some interesting differences emerged in the use of war frames between the Arab and Coalition media. Both Arab news sites framed the war as military conflict and always emphasized the violence of war. For example, the top headline in *Al Abram* online read, "Iraq is being destroyed and every effort should be made to stop the war" (April 1, 2003) and similarly, three days later: "American forces have begun their attack on Baghdad airport and 36 explosions rock the center of Baghdad" (April 4, 2003). *Al Jazeera's* online reports also often stressed destruction and human casualties: "More planes are downed, Americans captured, others killed" (March 23, 2003); "Baghdad raid kills hundreds of Iraqis" (April 5, 2003). The heavy focus on violence was typified by pictures of decimated buildings, dead soldiers, and wounded civilians. This type of war framing, coupled with an often negative tone, presented the Arab reader with a dismal and violent picture of the war. There was rarely any discussion about the future of Iraq and the rebuilding of the country in the two prestigious Arab news outlets. The focus was on current developments—the fighting, the losses, and the victims of the war. Thus, the Arab online audience saw a war with high human cost and heavy military and civilian casualties.

In contrast, the elite newspapers from the United States and the United Kingdom often framed the war in terms of long-term benefits, discussing the possibilities for democratic government and the need to receive help and involvement from the larger international community. *The New York Times* online on April 28, 2003, for instance, contained the following headline: "Bush vows to stand by Iraq until democracy flourishes." Coalition media included interviews with American and British officials who often talked about the future possibilities for freedom and stability for Iraq and its citizens. Also, the Coalition media emphasized the military success of their troops, focusing on war tactics and strategy. Thus, the U.S. and British online users were presented with strikingly different picture of the war: one where efficient and precise Coalition weapons were used to help liberate the Iraqi people and open up possibilities for growth and national development.

Surprisingly, the results showed no differences in the use of sources between the four online news sites. All of the sites examined here relied mostly on government sources and military officials. However, the categories in this study did not distinguish between the type of government sources

cited. It is plausible that the Arab media quoted mostly Arab leaders, whereas the Western media relied on British and American political and military officials, as suggested in prior research (Ghanem, 2005). For instance, Egyptian President Mubarak was very frequently cited in *Al Abram*, sometimes even in the headline of a news story: "Mubarak: We've done our best to prevent the war, and war protests should not turn into vandalism" (March 24, 2003). Other common sources for both Arab media outlets were the Prince of Saudi Arabia and Al Sahaf (the Iraqi minister of information). Citing mostly Arab political leaders as official sources could have contributed to the different tone and war framing in the Arab media.

Finally, there were some notable differences between the two Arab media and the two Coalition media. In contrast to *Al Abram*, *Al Jazeera* seemed to focus more heavily on personal stories and the human cost of war through the use of the human interest frame. This finding is consistent with Jasperson and El-Kikhia's (2003) examination of the TV coverage of the war in Afghanistan. *Al Jazeera* also stressed the opposition to the war more frequently through the use of the anti-war protest frame. The tone of the news coverage on the *Al Jazeera* site was also decisively more negative than *Al Abram*'s. It seems that *Al Jazeera*'s youth (it was established in 1996) and its objective to appeal to pan-Arabic sentiments makes it more likely to exhibit negative and episodic framing of the Iraq War.

Additionally, as the online outlet of a satellite news channel, as opposed to a newspaper, *Al Jazeera*'s Internet coverage may naturally have been dominated by the same kind of gripping visuals that characterized its telecasts. In fact, as one of the few media outlets with reporters inside Baghdad after the beginning of the war, *Al Jazeera* had a unique opportunity to provide images to the world. *Al Abram*, on the other hand, is allied to a print vehicle, where visuals are usually subordinate to text, and detailed analysis and balance are a journalistic ideal. The tone of its coverage may reflect these values.

Finally, a few interesting differences were also observed between *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. The elite U.S. newspaper was more likely to focus on the rebuilding of Iraq than its British counterpart. *The New York Times* was also more likely to use official government sources than *The Guardian*, which is consistent with Baden's (2003) findings. On the other hand, *The Guardian* used an anti-war protest frame more often than *The New York Times*. This finding is again consistent with prior research (Ravi, 2005). The overall differences among the Coalition media certainly warrant further investigation and were beyond the scope of this study.

### Limitations and Future Research

The results of the present study were based on the online coverage of a limited number of news media. Future studies should include additional news outlets from other Coalition countries and other countries in the Arab world,

as well as news outlets from Western European countries outside the Coalition of the Willing.

The data used in this analysis was collected by a group of undergraduate and graduate students at a large Southeastern university during the official war period. The analysis, therefore, is limited to the official war period. It is possible that as the official war period gave way to a lengthy period of rebuilding, framing of the war may have changed.

It is also possible that the outlets chosen were not indicative of the overall national media in the countries studied. Although previous studies have used *The New York Times* and *The Manchester Guardian* to represent the U.S. and U.K. media, respectively, there was no similar guidepost for the Arab world. Two often-cited Arabic language sites were therefore chosen for the analysis—however, it is unclear how representative these sources are of the broader Arab media. In addition, instead of making broad generalizations about Arab media, which are quite diverse (Sabry, 2005), future scholars should examine a larger sample of Middle Eastern media. It is important to recognize that Arab news outlets differ in both content and style.

## CONCLUSION

The “tale of war” in the Arab media was one of destruction and violence. The “tale of war” in the Coalition media was one of military conflict leading to rebuilding for the people of Iraq. Whereas the Arab media in this study focused on the personal toll of war in the present, the Coalition media focused on the “greater good” in Iraq’s future.

If, as McCombs and Ghanem (2003) suggested, exposure to specific frames can have effects on the evaluations of events made by recipients of those frames, then the results of this study suggest a concrete rationale for the wide gulf in public opinion about the Iraq War between American, British, and Arab citizens. Although much online reporting of the conflict relied on similar newswire sources (Legard & Lemon, 2003), online websites made radically different news choices in terms of framing and tone. These news choices indicate that the Internet has done little to create a homogenous “world” press. Rather, it has given individual news organizations a world stage on which to present their locally targeted views.

These findings enrich our understanding of online journalism, suggesting that it has many of the same characteristics as traditional journalism. The study adds to prior communication research by showing how the coverage of war differs in countries with different political and media systems. The study also expands the sparse cross-cultural literature on framing. The divergent frames between the Arab news sites and the U.S. and U.K. news sites were generally consistent with the national political environment. In spite

of conventional wisdom though, the study did not find as many differences between these news media as might have been anticipated. This suggests that media framing of issues such as war is influenced not only by the dominant political environment and national history and culture, but also by journalistic values and routines that may to some extent transcend national borders.

Through the use of different frames and different tone of war coverage, the Arab and Coalition media essentially constructed two different wars in order to appeal to the their local audiences. The divergent war framing most likely contributed to widening the schism in public opinion between the publics in the United Kingdom and the United States and the Arab world. Three years later, it remains to be seen whether in the wake of democratic elections in Iraq it will be possible to construct a single vision of peace for that beleaguered area of the world. Recent events, including the worldwide demonstrations in Islamic communities condemning the publication in European newspapers of cartoons that depicted the prophet Mohammad, and the subsequent inability of many Western media outlets to understand the anger of the Islamic communities, indicate that culture may at present make such a unified vision impossible.

## NOTES

1. Arguably, the tone variable can be measured differently. Aday, Livingston, and Hebert (2005), for example, note that using a scale variable (with 5 being most supportive and 1 being most negative toward the war) is a better measure of bias in news content. However, using a scale opens up more possibilities for disagreement between coders due to subjective judgment.

2. Holsti's intercoder reliability (IR) formula was used to check agreement between the coders:  $IR = 2M/(N_1 + N_2)$ , where M equals the number of agreements between the coders,  $N_1$  is the total number of coding decisions made by Coder 1 and  $N_2$  is the total number of coding decisions made by Coder 2.

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